

WASHINGTON D.C. (Today) – Chairman of the Asian Pacific American Caucus, Rep. Michael Honda, will hold a press conference on Thursday, June 4, at 12:00 p.m. on Cannon Terrace, or in case of rain Cannon House Office Building Room 441, to present key components of a comprehensive immigration package, in preparation for President Obama's reform agenda. Joining the Congressman will be other Members of Congress and supporting advocacy organizations. Rep Honda will discuss his Reuniting Families Act, to be introduced in Congress this week, and the need to reform America's family-based immigration system to end lengthy separations of loved ones, promote family stability and foster the economic growth that immigrant families have provided throughout our history.

Rep Honda said, "The Reuniting Families Act should be at the heart of comprehensive immigration reform, seeking to fix our broken immigration system while taking into account the current economic climate. Our family-based immigration system has not been updated in 20 years, separating spouses, children and their parents, who have played by the rules, for years, often decades. Our proposed legislation is in line with both American family values and with our short-term need to grow our economy and save taxpayer money."

WHEN: 12:00 p.m. Thursday, June 4, 2009

WHO: Congressman Michael Honda, other Members of Congress, advocacy organizations

WHERE: Cannon Terrace

Rain location: Cannon House Office Building, Room 441

The Reuniting Families Act helps to clear the current immigration logjam of 5.8 million people by providing legal mechanisms to streamline the application process. At present, the bureaucratic backlog wastes precious government resources, both human and financial. In response, the bill streamlines the application process so that it is fair and incentivizes potential applicants to use legal channels to join their family in the United States. A streamlined system and reduced backlog would demonstrate to immigrants tempted to arrive outside the legal process that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for those who stay within the legal process.

As a result of current long waits, many family members who apply for visas in the prime of their lives are not granted admission until they reach retirement age, undermining their economic contribution to our country and encouraging some frustrated relatives to resort to illegal migration. "By providing American workers with a vital social safety net – that is, their family – we help make our communities stronger and more resilient," said Rep Honda. "The benefits here cannot be overstated. American workers with families by their side are happier, healthier and more able to succeed than those distanced from loved ones for years on end."

Specifically, the bill does the following:

- Recaptures unused family-based and employment-based visas previously allocated by Congress which remain unused.

- Allows a green card holder to reunite with their spouses and minor children: The bill classifies the children and spouses of lawful permanent residents as “immediate relatives.” This would allow lawful permanent residence spouses and children to immediately qualify for a visa.

- Increases the per country limits of family and employment-based visas from 7% to 10%: Right now, each country only has a 7% share of the total cap of visas that Congress allocates each year. Increasing each country’s percentage of visas would eliminate the absurdly long wait times for individuals to immigrate from certain countries like the Philippines, China, and India.

- Allows orphans, widows and widowers to immigrate despite death of a petitioner.

- Promotes family unity by allowing more people to use the system: The bill gives the Attorney General greater flexibility to address numerous hardships, including family separation, caused by a provision that bars individuals who had been unlawfully present in the United States from utilizing our legal immigration system.

- Recognizes the sacrifices that certain World War II Filipino veterans made for this country, by exempting their children from the numerical caps on visas.

- Ends discrimination in immigration law, allowing same-sex partners to reunite.